Inclusive Education in Visually Impaired Children: Stakeholders Perspective

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Abstract: Despite of great progress is being made towards the Education for All and Millennium development goals (MDGs) demonstrated by increase number of enrollments in schools, children with disabilities are still combating educational exclusion. Inclusive education is an educational system in which children with and without disabilities learns together. To explore the perceptions of stakeholders regarding inclusive education in visually impaired children and identify gaps in their perceptions. To identify the barriers in implementation of inclusive education. A qualitative study using 20 in depth interviews and one focus group discussion with stakeholders was carried out to explore perceptions of stakeholders. Theoretical frameworks; part of health policy triangle (actors) was used with human rights, social constructivism and symbolic interactionism. Pure grounded theory analysis was used to reach the findings. Purposive and snow ball sampling was used to approach relevant respondents. The theory that emerged from study was that "inclusive education is difficult to implement at grass root level in Pakistan, however at tertiary level (universities and colleges) of education inclusion can be implemented due to better brail training and mental stability". Supporter explained their views in terms of participation, role of teachers, role of parents, benefits of inclusion, resources, awareness, level of education, equality and non discrimination. Non supporter explain their opinions in terms of financial instability, transport, parents selfish attitude, social stigma, psychological issue, initial training, limitation in selection of subjects and similar community. Inclusion implementation could show better results at stage of higher education. Financial instability and access to regular schools are main barrier for inclusion in Pakistan but meanwhile they believed that inclusion represent equity and non discrimination among visually impaired students.

Keywords: Visually Impaired, Inclusion, Stakeholders

1. Introduction

Globally it was estimated that 19 million children are blind, out of these, 12 million children are visually impaired due to uncorrected refractive errors and 1.4 million are irreversibly blind for the rest of their lives and need visual rehabilitation interventions for a full psychological and personal development [1]. The global financial cost of blindness with an onset during childhood, in terms of loss of earning capacity (per capita GNP) is greater than cost of adult blindness and has recently been estimated to be between US$ 6000 and $ 27000 million [2]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO 2011), the special schools failed to fulfill the needs of all learners with various forms of disabilities [3]. Inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from community [4]. The stakeholders are the persons or group that has interest or concern in an issue. In developing country like Pakistan Inclusive education is an emerging concept; a few schools are struggling to create an inclusive environment by using various approaches. These approaches include establishing new inclusive schools; creating an inclusive environment within existing schools; convincing physically normal children to join special education institutions; keeping children with special needs within regular school although in separate classrooms; and supporting schools with multigrade inclusive classrooms [5].

The study aims to explore the perceptions of stakeholders

regarding inclusive education in visually impaired children. To determine the barriers in implementation of inclusive education and to identify the gaps in perceptions of stakeholders.

2. Material and Methods

The study was pure qualitative research with Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory approach. The researcher has used a combination of social constructivism, human rights and symbolic interactionism keeping stakeholders as central focus in health policy triangle. The researcher found themselves in an outsider/Etic position towards the research. The study duration was 6 months (March 2016 to August 2016). The study was conducted in Wah Cantt city, Pakistan. A total of 20 in depth interviews were conducted. The purposive and snow ball sampling was used for approaching relevant stakeholder's. All individual that are involved in education of visually impaired children from grass root level to the higher level were included in this research. The informants were approached through direct interaction. For ethical concern, approval of study was obtained from ethical review board of Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital. An informed consent was distributed to all of participant of research. Researcher had used in depth interview and one focus group as a data collection tool. The interviews were audiotape except 2 that were taken on paper due to unwillingness of 2

females in recording of their voices. The interview was converted into local language that is Urdu according to convenience of participants. Focus group consists of 6 members other than facilitator and notes taker. The informants of focus group were provided with a positive incentive of lunch on the day of focus group discussion. The whole process of data collection, analysis and interpretation was done following grounded theory guidelines.

3. Results

After a detailed grounded theory analysis by the process described previously, a theory was generated describing the perceptions of stakeholders. "Inclusive education for visually impaired children is difficult to implement at grass root level in Pakistan however at tertiary level (college and universities) it is possible to implement as on this stage students are trained with brail and mentally stable to cope with diversities of society". A total of 20 informants were interviewed in study. Out of all informants' interviews, there were 12 females and 8 males. Out of all informants that were interviewed, there were 8 teachers, 5 students, 4 parents, Punjab special education department members 2 and political member 1. There were 6 members of focus group discussion that include 2 parents, 2 students and 2 teachers. The whole theory with relationship between categories is presented in pictorial form in figure
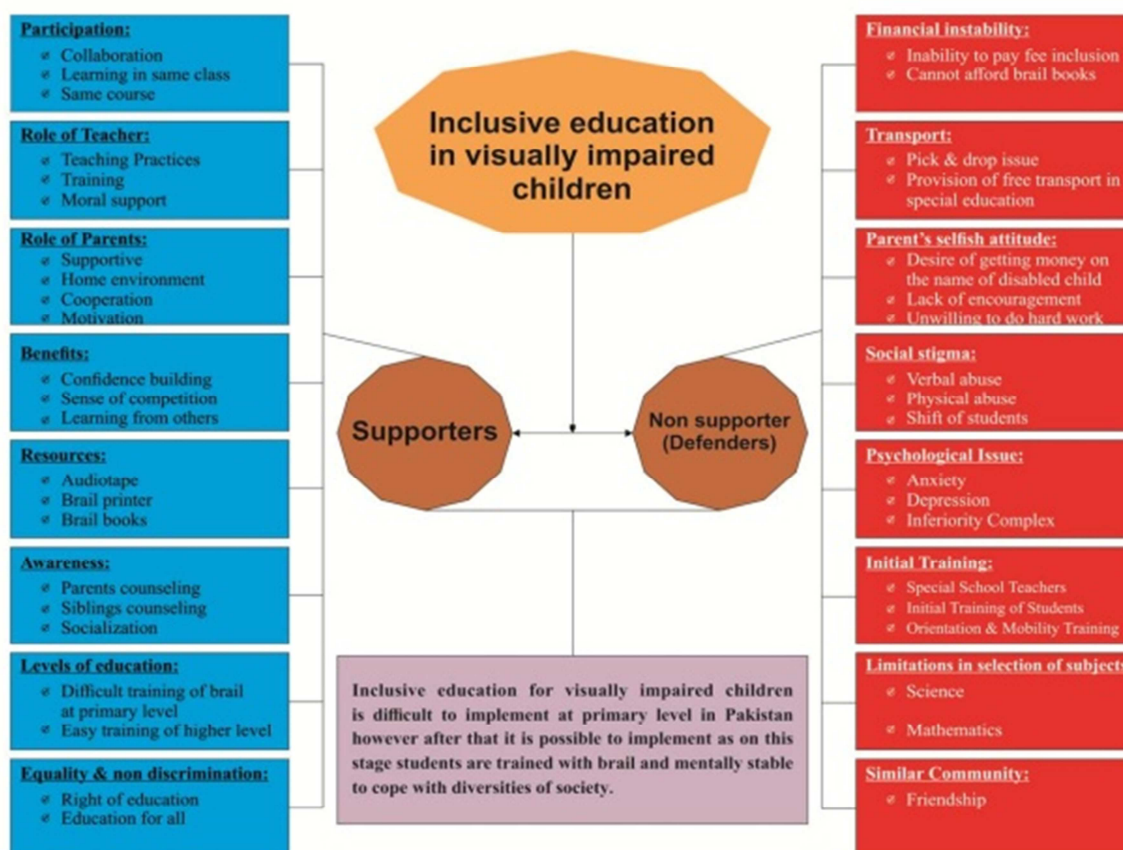

Figure 1. Model for inclusive education in visually impaired children.

The supporter informants expressed that learning in inclusive education will allowed visually impaired and regular students to study in same class, learn similar course and experience the charm of variety of teachers at school (".…. I haven't studied in inclusive education because I lost my sight after college but my visually impaired friends are studying in inclusive education at Lahore. They live in hostel of that institute in very friendly environment with regular *students"…).* The lack of awareness is found among parents related to inclusive education ("In Pakistan begging is adopted as profession for visually impaired persons, even in those families where other family members are well educated. People don't know that there is quota for visually impaired persons in Government jobs that's why they are not sending their disable children's to school……."). The informants reported that parent's selfish attitude is still a part of our society (".…. Every year Pakistan Bait-Ul-Mal officials come to visit our school and encourage these visually impaired students by giving them some money as gift. So if I'll inform these parents that Barack Obama is coming, they would not be so happy as if I told them that persons from Biat- Ul Mall are coming to ceremony. The parents try to reach at school as soon as possible and try to sit in front rows so what meaning should I get from it…..."). Informants expressed that one reason of not sending their visually impaired child to regular schools is that they can't afford their transport (".…. Most of parents send their visually impaired children to special education schools because in Punjab all Government and non Government institutes provide handicap children pick and drop and even some of them arrange lunch for these children daily while it's not possible in regular school……"). Informants expressed social stigma as major cause of no sending visually impaired children in regular schools because have to face verbal and physical abuse by other regular students ("…Due to lake of education people name others according to their appearance similarly in schools when a child is without leg named as "LANGRA" without hand is named as "TONDA" with mental disabilities is named as "KAMLA" and with visual disability is named as "ANNA". Students at initial stage of study cannot survive in this environment……"). The informants reported that children with visual impairment when studied with regular students they will got the inferiority complex leading them towards anxiety and depression ("……. In inclusive education due to greater strength of students sometimes teachers cannot give proper attention to visually impaired students so this behavior of teacher demoralizes students…..").

The respondents highlighted that inclusion in Pakistan is difficult at primary level because at that stage it's difficult to train a child with brail while for children it is easy to study in inclusion when they are in higher education stage.('I have studied in inclusive education after metric but at that time I don't have any need to learn brail so I recorded my lectures or studied with brail books…….". (".…. some of the children of junior section who were partially sighted came to

our school (special), previously they were studying in regular schools but they were not able to cope with regular students at this age but I think they would be able to study with regular students when we train them………"). The informants explained that visually impaired students have some limitation in selection of subjects including mathematics and science subject. So with regular students they are going to feel this difference more than in special education.

("We don't allow visually impaired children to select subjects of science because they are going to hurt with chemicals in laboratory…..").("Visually impaired children love to learn mathematics but we cannot teach them without showing equations, symbols and formulas on black board……"). The informants reported that for proper learning children need similar community. In special school they were like each other but in regular school there is a great diversity among them so they feel uncomfortable. At tertiary level they might feel comfortable but at primary level it's not easy for them to adjust with harsh realities of life.

("In our schools all visually impaired students are friends of each other. They play and study together. If they would be in regular school they might feel alone because if normal are going to be their friend then why got so dishearten from their siblings…..")

4. Discussion

The current research was designed to explore perceptions of stakeholder's about inclusive education in visually impaired children using symbolic interactionsim to explain the lived world of respondents. Present research explained that collaboration of special school teachers, regular teachers and parents is essential for inclusive education in visually impaired children. A study conducted in Bostwana explained that lack of collaboration was found among stakeholders [6].

It was found that role of teachers is an important aspect to be considered that include their teaching strategies, teachers attitude towards diversity of students, supportive role, workload and class size in school. A study on teacher's attitude towards inclusive education of disables explains that teachers are highly enthusiastic about their experiences but visually impaired and hearing disables are least preferred categories for them [7]. Present study found out benefits of inclusive education that included improvement in confidence of visually impaired children; develop sense of competition among children, improvement in academic performance and learning from physically normal children. Evidence exists that inclusive education explains availability of opportunity, acceptance of disability, diversity, absence of bias and inequality [8].

This study highlighted that need of resources is an essential step for implementation of inclusive education in visually impaired children. A study conducted in South Africa stated that for inclusive education the learners require special needs to be accomplished [9]. In this study informants

reported that supportive role of parents is required for inclusive education. Parent's motivation and cooperation plays important role in implementation of this concept. Similar studies reported that in England, they reported that parents are poorly informed about inclusive education [10]. Lack of awareness among parent's leads to misperceptions of inclusion that shapes negative attitude towards inclusive education [11]

This study find out that inclusive education is difficult to implement at primary level while easy to implement at higher level. The reason found was that at primary level children require special attention and training. Similar studies contradict with these findings. They stated that inclusion progress well at primary level while at secondary level it encounters serious difficulties. While a similar study stated that tertiary education is socially selected for persons with disabilities in most of European countries [12]. This study highlighted that inclusive education is based upon equality and non discrimination. It prevents isolation among visually impaired children. Similar studies stated that access and equity are required for inclusion implementation. They mentioned that students must be provided with equal access, auxiliary aids and services. social stigma is a major barrier in implementation of inclusive education in Pakistan. The visually handicap students face verbal and physical abuse by other regular students that let them down. Similar studies reported that students have to face negative attitude in inclusion such as inferiority complex, pity, avoidance, stereotyping and denial. Evidence exists that disability is related with social stigma, discrimination and negative stereo-typing [13]. Another study stated that most of students learning in inclusive education feel rejected by regular students and school staff [14].

This study highlighted that similar community is found to be helpful in proper learning of visually impaired children. It was found that in special schools the disable children feel comfortable because they with student who are like them. Similar studies contradict with these findings. They stated that student with and without disabilities are friends, respect each other, help each other in studies and even some learners restructured the rules of games so that they can include their friends with disabilities into games [15].

The study strength was that it includes stakeholders with great diversity on the basis of age, profession, economic status etc that assure the creditability of research. The research includes one focus group discussion despite of limited resources. The study was qualitative in nature so its findings are not generalizable on entire population of Pakistan. Study was limited in one city that was Wah Cantt except a few respondents, it affects generalizability.

5. Conclusion

Inclusive education in Pakistan is at its initial stages and is found to be a rarely known concept among stakeholders. Stakeholders perceive inclusive education as a beneficial implication but after primary schooling. Because at the time of primary schooling children with special needs require special attention but after primary education they would be trained enough to cope with other regular students. Stakeholders explain that for implementation of this concept child need support assistant aids like brail books, audio tapes and brail printer in regular schools. Financial instability and access to regular schools is found to be main barrier for inclusion in Pakistan but meanwhile they believed that inclusion represent equity and non discrimination among visually impaired students.

Acknowledgments

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